DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 669 CG 022 203

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TITLE Gender and Sex-Role Stereotypes in Scales of Death Concern.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (97th, New Orleans, LA, August 11-15, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; Attitude Measures; Comparative Analysis; *Death; *Fear; Higher Education; *Sex Differences; Sex Role; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Collett Lester Fear of Death Scales; Death Anxiety Scale

ABSTRACT

Consistent with the literature, 67 undergraduate females in the present study reported significantly more death anxiety on Templer's Death Anxiety Scale and the Collett Lester Fear of Death of Others and Dying of Self scales than did 25 undergraduate males. Regression analyses revealed that when Bem's Masculinity and Femininity Scales were included in standard regression, gender no longer made a significant contribution in predicting scores on Templer's scale or the Collett-Lester Fear of Death of Self and Fear of Dying of Self. Thus when the subjects contemplated their own deaths, gender differences in death anxiety could be accounted for by a "feminine" sex role orientation. (Twelve references and one table are included.) (TE)

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ED314669

Gender and Sex-Role Stereotypes in Scales of Death Concern

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Abstract

Consistent with the literature, females in the present study reported significantly more death anxiety on Templer's Death Anxiety Scale and the Collett-Lester Fear of Death of Others and Dying of Self scales than males. Regression analyses revealed that when Bem's Masculinity and Femininity Scales were included in standard regression, gender no longer made a significant contribution in predicting scores on Templer's Scale or the Collett-Lester Fear of Death of Self and Fear of Dying of Self. Thus when subjects contemplate their own deaths, gender differences in death anxiety can be accounted for by a "feminine" sex-role orientation.

In a recent review Lonetto and Templer (1986) considered a large number of studies concerned primarily with Templer's (1970) Death of Anxiety Scale and concluded that gender is one of the variables that is most consistently related to death anxiety, with women reporting greater death anxiety. Studies of sex differences on the Collett-Lester Fear of Death Scale (Lester, 1974) are less common but Lester (1972) reported that females had a significantly greater fear of death of self, death of others and dying of self than did males. Templer, Lester and Ruff (1974) explored the relationship between both of the above-mentioned scales and Gough's Femininity Scale (1952) and concluded that there was a positive but weak association between femininity and fear of death possibly associated with general anxiety. Lester (1984-85) explicitly related Bem's (1981) androgyny score to death concern and found that while it related to items regarding the consequences of death, it was unrelated to fear of death of self or fear of dying of self.

The purpose of the present study was to explore further the relationship of sex-role stereotypes to the gender differences on both of these scales. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (1981) provides measures of Masculinity and Femininity which are independent and reliable measures. Given the questions raised in the literature (Spence, 1985) for purposes of the present study, these scales will simply be used as measures of stereotypic behaviors often associated with the sexes, i.e., interpersonal orientation with Femininity and self-assertion with Masculinity. Based on the recommendations of Kastenbaum and Costa (1977) the present study will also control for general anxiety using Spielberger's (1983) State Trait Anxiety Inventory

and for social desirability using the Marlowe-Crowne Scale of Social Desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

Hypothesis 1. Previous findings will be replicated with females reporting more death anxiety than males.

Hypothesis 2. Sex-related differences in death concern will be accounted for by sex-role stereotypes as measured by the Femininity and Masculinity scores of Bem scale.

Method

Subjects were 92 undergraduate students, 67 women and 25 men, who participated anonymously in groups for course credit. Each subject received a packet of paper and pencil inventories including the above mentioned scales in a constant order.

Results

Hypothesis 1. Table 1 reveals no significant sex differences in age, Trait Anxiety, State Anxiety, or Social Desirability. However, females report more death anxiety on Templer's Death Anxiety Scale and higher scores on fear of death of others and fear of dying of self.

Hypothesis 2. Given the replication of greater self-reported death concern by females on three of five of the scales of interest, multiple regression analyses were undertaken to provide further clarification of sex differences. When only the anxiety scales, social desirability and gender are used as predictors for Templer's Death Anxiety Scale, gender ($p<.001$) and Trait Anxiety ($p<.01$) enter as significant predictors in the regression equation [Multiple R = .50, F (4,87) = 7.20, $p<.001$]. However if Bem's Femininity and

Masculinity scales are entered with the anxiety scales and Social Desirability in standard regression gender does not offer a significant increase in prediction when entered at the next step. In fact the only significant individual predictor in the significant equation [Multiple R = .56, F (5,86, F (5,86) = 7.79, $p<.001$] is Femininity.

In predicting Fear of Death of Self, when the anxiety scales, Social Desirability and gender are entered in standard regression format [Multiple R = .39, F (4,87) = 3.92, $p<.01$] significant contributions are made by gender ($P<.01$), Social Desirability ($p,.01$) and Trait Anxiety ($p<.01$). However when Masculinity and Femininity are included in standard regression, gender no longer enters on the next step and Femininity ($p<.01$) is the only significant predictor in the equation [Multiple R = .46, F (5,86) = 4.65, $p<.001$].

When predicting Fear of Death of Others, gender enters as the only significant predictor regardless of the inclusion of Masculinity and Femininity in the equation, and all equations are significant.

In the case of Fear of Dying of Self, when the anxiety scales, Social Desirability and gender are entered in standard regression, gender ($p<.05$) is the only significant predictor in the equation [Multiple R = .42, F (4,87) = 4.60, $p<.005$]. However when Masculinity and Femininity are entered in the standard regression, gender does not offer a significant increase in prediction. In this case the equation is significant [Multiple R = .48, F (5,86) = 5.10, $p<.001$] and State Anxiety ($p<.05$) and Femininity ($p<.05$) are the only significant predictors.

In the case of Fear of Dying of Others, gender makes no significant contribution to either regression equation.

Discussion

The present study replicated the consistently found sex differences on Templer's Death Anxiety Scale. On the Collett-Lester females score significantly higher on Fear of Death of others and Fear of Dying of Self, partially consistent with Lester's (1972) finding. Given significant sex differences, regression analyses were used to explore factors which would predict death concern.

In the case of Templer's scale, when the Bem scales are entered in a standard regression gender offers no additional predictive power. Thus, in the present sample these sex-role scales are accounting for what have been thought of as gender differences in Templer's scale. Regression analyses of the Collett-Lester Fear of Death of Self and Fear of Dying of Self the predictive contribution of gender is significant but no longer offers an increase in predictive power when the Masculinity and Femininity scales are included in standard regression.

When considering the Collett-Lester Fear of Death of Others, the present results indicate that the two scales of sex-role stereotypy cannot account for the differences in gender. Finally, in the case of Fear of Dying of Others, no gender differences appear, making sex-role stereotypes irrelevant.

The present findings suggest a plausible explanation for gender differences in death concern as a function of sex-role stereotypes, as measured by Bem's scale. When the present subjects contemplate <u>their own deaths</u>, those with a more feminine or interpersonally oriented sex-role orientation are more likely to affirm items reflecting death anxiety and fear of death regardless of gender. Further efforts will attempt to clarify the meaning of these sex role stereotypes and their measurement.

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Table 1

Sex differences in scales of death concern and other personality and demographic measures.

		Gender		
		Males (N=25)	Females (N=67)	t
Age	M	28.68	30.09	.60
	SD	10.05	10.10	
Trait Anxiety	M	39.68	38.24	.70
	SD	8.81	8.77	
State Anxiety	M	32.60	35.03	.91
	SD	9.35	12.02	
Social Desirability	M	13.80	13.13	.56
	SD	5.32	4.94	
Templer's Death Anxiety Scale	M	5.16	7.73	3.32***
	SD	3.00	3.41	
Collett-Lester				
Death of Self	M	-3.24	2.21	1.97
	SD	9.98	12.42	
Death of Others	M	1.56	7.73	3.27**
	SD	8.90	7.73	
Dying of Self	M	2.40	5.03	2.34*
	SD	5.13	4.67	
Dying of Others	M	-10.20	-8.09	.93
	SD	8.21	10.21	
Bem Sex-Role Inventory				
Femininity	M	45.04	55.78	4.92***
	SD	10.18	8.98	
Masculinity	M	54.08	48.15	2.69**
	SD	9.88	9.26	

*p<.05
**p<.01
***p<.001